DEFIANT™

3
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THE GOOD GUYS

Charlie Adlard

And From The Darkness... CHASM

NEW YORK CITY... A LONG WAY FROM HOME...

GIVE IT UP, CRANE. NOT EVEN YOU CAN CATCH SKRAG.

OH, YEAH? GOTCHA!

HEY, WHAT KIND OF A HOTEL IS THIS? REGINALD AND I COULDN'T EVEN FIND A POOL, OR VIDEO ARCADE, OR NOTHING.

SO DO A LITTLE WORKOUT. ZACK MAKES A GOOD LITTLE DUMBBELL.

HEY!

HE AND I ARE CHECKING OUT MTV. DAN IS HOVERING OUTSIDE.

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INKED BY CHARLES YOAKUM
PAINTED BY MARCUS DAVID
LETTERED BY AGNES PINAHA

YEOW! YOU HIT MY SORE RIB!

IS THAT WHY YOU COULDN'T DO A THING AGAINST THAT MONSTER YESTERDAY -- A BOO-BOO ON YOUR RIBBY-POO?

YOU DIDN'T DO MUCH AGAINST THAT THING EITHER, BITE-BRAIN.

THAT'S WHITE CRANE, CHUMP.

REGGIE, HELP ME GET THESE TWO APART!

HEY, YOU TWO! WE HAVE ENOUGH TO WORRY ABOUT AS IT IS.

LIKE HOW TO GET BACK TO CALIFORNIA. I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE BEEN OUT ALL NIGHT WITHOUT PERMISSION, AND I'M OLDER THAN ANY OF YOU.

I CAN GET US HOME.

NOT ANOTHER TRIP THROUGH ONE OF YOUR MAGIC DOORS!

A DUDE COULD GO IN THERE AND NEVER COME OUT!

FORGET THAT.

WE DON'T ALWAYS HAVE TO GO THROUGH THE VIDEO REALM DOORWAYS TO GET AROUND. THERE ARE OTHER WAYS.

LIKE WHAT?

LIKE HOLD ONTO YOUR HORSES, AND I'LL SHOW YOU.

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A TOWEL? GET REAL.

DON'T TELL ME--YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT DOING A MAGIC CARPET BIT.

SURE! DIDN'T YOU GUYS SEE *ALADDIN*?

ZACK, THAT WON'T WORK. CALIFORNIA'S A *LONG* WAY.

IT WILL, *TOO*! I'LL SHOW YOU! I'LL GO THERE AND BACK RIGHT NOW!

DON'T HIT YOUR HEAD ON THE WINDOW, SPELLCASTER.

I WON'T. WATCH THIS!

COOL! HELLO, HOUSEKEEPING? CAN YOU SEND UP A FEW MORE TOWELS, LIKE SIX MORE OF THE BIG ONES, PLEASE?

YEAH. UP, UP AND AWAAAY! THIS IS GREAT!

WONDER WHICH WAY IT IS TO ANAHEIM.

IT SURE GETS *COLD* IN NEW YORK. HEY, WHERE'D THE *HOTEL* GO?

NOW WHAT DO I DO? THIS NEVER HAPPENS TO *SUPERMAN*.

HEY, SPELLCASTER, DUDE. YOU WANNA FREEZE TO DEATH OUT HERE, OR WHAT?

RECON! HEY, HOW COME *YOU'RE* NOT FREEZIN'?

HM. I DON'T KNOW. IT MUST COME WITH THE FLYING.

ROOM SERVICE.
COME IN!
I HAVE THE TOWELS YOU--
FORGET THIS! IT'S *FREEZIN'* OUT THERE!
I DIDN'T SEE IT. I DIDN'T SEE IT.
I DIDN'T--
OMPH!
BE *CAREFUL*, YOUNG MAN! YOU COULD *HURT* YOURSELF!
OWW! WHAT, ARE YOU MADE OUT OF SOLID BRICK OR SOMETHING?
FIRST FLYING KIDS! NOW A *LINEBACKER* IN DRAG! I SHOULDA GONE TO COLLEGE, LIKE MOM SAID.

HI, MRS. JOHNSON!

HELLO, KIDS.

I'M A *LITTLE* DISAPPOINTED IN YOU. I ASKED YOU TO BE DISCREET ABOUT THE SPECIAL THINGS YOU CAN DO UNTIL I GOT BACK.

YEAH, WELL, THERE'S NOTHING TO *DO* IN THIS DUMP!

I'M SORRY I COULDN'T AFFORD A NICER HOTEL. DON'T YOU UNDERSTAND, YOU CAN GET YOURSELVES IN *TROUBLE*?

LOOK, WE'RE GRATEFUL FOR YOUR HELP YESTERDAY.

BUT AS YOU CAN SEE...

...WE CAN TAKE CARE OF OURSELVES.

I *KNOW* YOU'RE VERY STRONG, DEAR... BUT IT'S EASIER TO *BEND* SOMETHING...

...THAN IT IS TO *STRAIGHTEN* IT. YOU *HAVE* TO LEARN TO BE CAREFUL AND USE YOUR GIFTS WISELY.

NOW... DO YOUR *PARENTS* KNOW WHERE YOU ARE?

NO ANSWER. I TAKE IT THAT MEANS NO.

WELL, THEN DO ANY OF YOUR PARENTS KNOW ABOUT WHAT YOU CAN *DO*?

WELL... UM... YES, MY FATHER KNOWS.

ALL RIGHT, THEN HE'S THE ONE WE'LL CALL. GIVE ME YOUR NUMBER.

THREE THOUSAND MILES AWAY...

RING!

... IN THE HOME OF DAN NEALE...

RING!

I HOPE THAT'S LAURA!

HELLO... THIS IS DAN NEALE. WHO'S THIS? WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, MRS. JOHNSON?

YOU'RE WITH MY DAUGHTER?! IS SHE ALL RIGHT? OH, I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW *RELIEVED* I AM!

NO, I'M AFRAID I DON'T KNOW HER FRIENDS. WHERE ARE YOU?

NEW YORK CITY? HOW DID THEY GET... WHAT ARE THEY DOING *THERE?*

THEY WERE... FIGHTING A MONSTER? NO, NO, I BELIEVE YOU. I'VE SEEN TOO MUCH UNBELIEVABLE STUFF LATELY TO, UM... TO DOUBT IT.

THEY'RE THE ONES WHO DESTROYED THE WEST SIDE HIGHWAY? I HEARD ON THE NEWS THAT IT MYSTERIOUSLY COLLAPSED.

UH-HUH. I APPRECIATE YOUR PUTTING THEM UP IN A HOTEL OVERNIGHT. YES, I'LL ARRANGE FOR AIRLINE TICKETS AND MEET THEM AT LAX.

SEVEN OF THEM? UHH! I HOPE MY CREDIT CARD CAN TAKE IT.

YES... THANK YOU.

SOME SEVEN HOURS AND ONE NON-STOP FLIGHT LATER, AT THE HOME OF MATTHEW AND ZACHARIAH SAHS, A.K.A. **SKRAG** AND **SPELLCASTER**...

MATTHEW! ZACHARIAH! I WAS WORRIED TO DEATH. I CALLED THE POLICE. WHERE WERE YOU? MATT, YOU HAVE SOME EXPLAINING TO DO.

SORRY, MOM.

MISSED YOU, MOMMY.

AT PAUL COHEN, A.K.A. **FRONT'S**, HOUSE...

STAYING OUT ALL NIGHT! I'LL WHACK YOU GOOD, BOY... **OW!**

NEARLY BROKE MY **HAND!** YOU GOT A STEEL PLATE IN YOUR PANTS?

ACROSS THE STREET, AT THE HOME OF REGINALD JACKSON, A.K.A. **NOBODY**...

FRANK, WE'RE BOTH HER PARENTS. WE'VE BOTH GOT TO--

QUIET, SHE'S COMING.

OH, IT'S ONLY REGINALD. YOU'RE TOO QUIET, SON. WE HARDLY KNOW IF YOU'RE HERE.

OR CARE.

AT JENNI LEE, A.K.A. **WHITE CRANE'S**, HOUSEHOLD...

JENNI, WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO THINK. THIS IS NOT LIKE YOU.

I MEANT NO DISRESPECT. IT WAS A MATTER OF HONOR, DADDY... MOMMY... SOMETHING I HAD TO DO. I ASK YOU TO TRUST ME ON THIS, WITHOUT QUESTIONING ME, **PLEASE**.

WE'LL TAKE YOU ON YOUR HONOR, JENNI. BUT REMEMBER THAT WE'RE HERE FOR YOU.

AT THE HOME OF DANIEL JACOB, A.K.A. **RECON**...

DANIEL, HOW **COULD** YOU? YOU HAD YOUR GRANDMOTHER WORRIED TO DEATH, NOT TO MENTION YOUR FATHER AND ME.

PIGS WILL GROW WINGS BEFORE YOU'RE ALLOWED OUT OF THE HOUSE AGAIN, YOUNG MAN.

AND, AT LAURA "FLEX" NEALE'S HOUSE...

THANKS FOR BEING COOL, DAD. I MEAN, IT WAS NICE OF YOU TO JUST DROP OFF THE OTHER KIDS INSTEAD OF, YOU KNOW... TELLING ON THEM.

I PROBABLY **SHOULD** HAVE...

...BUT I UNDERSTAND WHAT'S GOING ON WITH YOU KIDS BETTER THAN YOU KNOW.

SOMETHING HAPPENED TO ALL OF YOU THAT MADE YOU SUPERHUMAN, JUST LIKE IN THE COMICS... AND WHATEVER IT WAS...

...IT HAPPENED TO **ME**, TOO!

DADDY?!

I SHOULD HAVE TOLD YOU EARLIER, JUST LIKE YOU TOLD ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

UNTIL ALL OF US, YOU KIDS **AND** -- I, FIGURE OUT WHAT TO DO WITH THIS -- THESE **POWERS** -- THE FEWER PEOPLE WHO KNOW, THE BETTER. WE'RE IN THIS **TOGETHER**, LAURA...

...BUT, UH... THERE **IS** ONE PROBLEM. YOUR **MOTHER** CALLED LAST NIGHT. SHE WANTS YOU BACK WITH HER IN FLORIDA.

WELL PAST THE WITCHING HOUR IN CENTRAL PARK, MANHATTAN...

...A CENTRAL PARK FEW PEOPLE ARE ABLE TO SEE...

THIS IS THE **SUBSTRATUM**... THE PHANTASMIC QUANTUM PLANE UNDERLYING WHAT **WE** CALL REALITY.

A MAN EMERGES FROM WHAT **WE** THINK OF AS SOLID GROUND.

HIS NAME IS **CHASM** IN THIS UNSEEN WORLD...

...AND **CHARLES MAL** IN OURS.

IS MY CHARTERED FLIGHT TO L.A. STILL WAITING AT JFK? FINE. PICK ME UP AT 72ND AND CENTRAL PARK WEST.

I'LL BE GOING TO THE AIRPORT, BUT FIRST WE'LL MAKE A SHORT DETOUR.

TAKE ME TO THE **BASTILLE**.

SOON, AT A CONDEMNED BUILDING ON MANHATTAN'S WEST SIDE...

...WHICH SERVES CHARLES MAL AS A PRIVATE **PRISON**...

EVENIN', MISTER MAL, SIR.

WELL, HELLO AGAIN, MY DEAR "FOREIGN VISITOR."

IT'S BEEN AN INTERESTING DAY. I MET SOMEONE WHO'S *BEEN* TO WHERE YOU COME FROM...

... AND I GUESS YOU COULD SAY I "PICKED HER BRAIN."

IT'S... ANOTHER WORLD ENTIRELY, ISN'T IT?

I HAVE TO TELL YOU, THAT'S HARD TO *BELIEVE*... EVEN FOR SOMEONE LIKE *ME*.

HERE'S WHAT I FOUND OUT -- YOU DON'T GET THERE IN A SPACESHIP OR FLYING SAUCER. IT'S *HERE*, BUT NOT HERE. A STEP *BEYOND* WHERE I CAN REACH.

AND IT'S A PLACE... OF DREAMS. OF A... A REALITY SO BIZARRE, IT'S...

WELL, I'LL TELL YOU WHAT IT IS -- IT'S THE KEY TO *TRANSCENDING* THE LIMITATIONS OF THIS POOR, TIRED WORLD.

WHY... FOR SOMEONE LIKE ME, TO GO THERE WOULD BE TO TOUCH THE MIND OF GOD. WHO KNOWS WHAT I COULD *ACCOMPLISH*, IF...

AH, BUT FIRST THINGS FIRST.

NOW, I UNDERSTAND THAT IT'S *VERY IMPORTANT* TO YOU TO DIE *THERE*, RIGHT? SORT OF A RELIGIOUS THING.

I SUSPECT THAT THIS LITTLE BUG-THING IS ACTUALLY THE... "MACHINE" THAT TAKES PEOPLE BACK AND FORTH, RIGHT?

TELL ME, FRIEND... OR YOU'LL DIE HERE. *TELL* ME... AND I'LL TAKE YOU *WITH* ME.

YES. YES, IT'S A *TRANS-PORTRON*.

THANK YOU.

GOOD-BYE.

ELIMINATE HIM. AND DISPOSE OF THE BODY IN THE USUAL WAY.

YES, SIR, MISTER MAL.

WOODLAND HILLS, CALIFORNIA, LATE THAT NIGHT...

CHASM! THAT'S THE HOUSE! THERE, THERE, THERE!

STOP HERE -- ON THE RIGHT.

YEP, HE'S IN THERE! WHY DID YOU WANT ME TO ATTACH MY OTHER HALF TO THAT KID? BECAUSE HE KILLED YOUR HARD-WORLD DEMON IN NEW YORK?

NO. I THINK THIS KID MAY BE THE KEY TO UNRAVELING A MYSTERY THAT'S VERY IMPORTANT TO ME.

WELL, HE'S IN THERE! YEP. ONCE US CODEPENDENCY COOTIES ARE SPLIT, WE ALWAYS FIND OUR OTHER HALF. YEP!

OH, I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE ME AGAIN! I KNOW MY OTHER IS OKAY, BUT I'VE BEEN SO WORRIED.

I DOUBT YOUR OTHER HALF WAS EVEN PERCEIVED, EXISTING ON THE SUBSTRATUM AS YOU DO.

YOU'RE CHATTY FOR A DEMON. OTHER DEMONS ARE SO... TACITURN.

WE GET NERVOUS WHEN WE'RE SEPARATED! I TALK WHEN I'M NERVOUS.

YOU MAY GO ON AHEAD TO YOUR REUNION, IF YOU WANT.

YEEEEE!

ACROSS THE STREET, IN THE BEDROOM OF REGINALD JACKSON, A.K.A. "NOBODY"...

OH, MAN...

... I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE.

I KEEP THINKING I HEAR NOISES.

I KNOW YOU'RE IN THERE!

I USE TA BELIEVE IN MONSTERS, WHEN I WAS A LITTLE KID. THEN I GREW UP AND REALIZED IT WAS MY IMAGINATION.

BUT THAT WAS *BEFORE* I COULD TURN INVISIBLE. NOW I *KNOW* YOU'RE REAL.

SO YOU'D BETTER JUST STOP MESSIN' AROUND HERE, TRYING TO SCARE ME...

... OR I'M COMING OVER THERE!

YOU COULDN'T HURT ME BEFORE, SO YOU CAN'T HURT ME NOW. I'M NOT AFRAID OF YOU.

YAHHH!

GO AWAY! I'M N-NOT SCARED OF YOU, SO JUST GET OUTTA HERE!

OH, MAN. I DIDN'T WANT TO SEE THAT.

I DON'T WANT TO SEE ANY OF THESE THINGS. IT'S LIKE THERE'S MONSTERS EVERYWHERE!

HEY! WHAT'S THAT?

IT'S A GUY COMING OUT OF PAUL'S HOUSE-- THROUGH THE WALL!

IT'S AN *INVISIBLE* GUY... LIKE *ME*. WHAT'S GOING ON HERE?

SHOULD I FOLLOW HIM, OR SHOULD I CHECK ON PAUL? MAYBE I'D BETTER NOT LET HIM GET AWAY!

I HOPE HE DIDN'T HURT PAUL. I WONDER WHERE WE'RE GOING?

HEY, THIS IS MATT AND ZACK'S HOUSE! WHAT'S GOING *ON*?!

AS NOBODY WATCHES IN HORROR, CHASM REACHES DEEP INTO THE SLEEPING ZACK'S DREAMS...

...PULLING THE SWIRLING MAELSTROM OF IMAGES FROM HIS SUBCONSCIOUS OUT INTO THE ROOM AROUND THEM.

IN THE TEMPEST HE CATCHES GLIMPSES OF A WOMAN ZACK FEARS AS A SORCERESS, AND A BOX WITH A POWERFUL SECRET LURKING INSIDE.

PROBING EVER DEEPER, CHASM TOUCHES UPON SECRETS EVEN ZACK DOES NOT REALIZE HE KNOWS.

DEFIANT™ Proudly Presents...

THE GOOD GUYS™ Event

Meet the Real-Life Winners of Our Superhero Contest!

November 26, the day after Thanksgiving. As I stepped from a taxi at Kennedy Airport outside New York City that morning, little did I know that I was embarking on perhaps the most unusual adventure of my life—one in which reality would succumb to art, where the lines demarcating truth from fantasy would fall aside under the glow of several young people who held a wish to be heroes. I was on my way to meet eight characters I had helped to create—to meet them myself for the first time in the flesh—and to help introduce them to the world.

Grey, the penciler of *THE GOOD GUYS*, arrived at the same time and greeted me with his usual strong handshake. Inside, we met up with DEFIANT's Sales and Marketing Manager, Clark Smith, and Sheila DeLacy, Editorial Assistant. Clark was both smiles and nervousness. (This event capping *THE GOOD GUYS* Casting Call Contest was his baliwick.)

During our flight, I looked at Grey and asked, "Are you excited?" "*Relieved* is more like it," he responded, shaking his head. That reaction was understandable. Grey, Charles Yoakum, Tim Perkins, Deborah Purcell, and Ed Polgardy, among others, had spent many sleepless nights making certain this title met its deadline—which wasn't an easy feat, considering the winners of *THE GOOD GUYS* Casting Call Contest were determined mere weeks before the book was due at the printer. Jim Shooter had said during

A proud Jim Shooter with his real-life *Good Guys*.

The Good Guys **bonding at Disneyland.**

one particularly hectic and doubt-filled period: "There is no 'try'; we must *do*."

After arriving at Los Angeles International Airport, Grey, Sheila, Clark, and I met up with media consultant David Gibson and boarded a van hired to take us to Anaheim. Before leaving the airport, the driver made a stop at another terminal and got out to talk to one of his colleagues. Sheila was in the back seat reading *THE GOOD GUYS* #1 for the first time. I turned to look out the side window—L.A. is great for people watching—and spotted a face that looked strikingly familiar. "Hey," I yelled out the window, "aren't you one of *The Good Guys*?!"

The head turned, the face registering a look of surprise, and a smile came soon afterwards. We had never met, had never even spoken on the phone, yet I knew him. And Grey knew him even better. Jeff Miller was one of *The Good Guys*: His character would debut in the second issue, which I had just scripted on the plane!

What does it feel like to write about someone, to draw someone who you've never met—to get to know them even in their absence, and then to suddenly come face-to-face with them? *Incredulous* is an understatement. Yet no sooner did I climb out of the van and greet Jeff, his lovely mother, and twin sister than I got my second jolt. "My man—*Front*," rang out Grey's deep voice. I turned and followed his gaze to a second young man. "Another *Good Guy*!" I said, barely containing my childlike enthusiasm. Paul Cohen and his father had also arrived!

Soon we were at our hotel and waiting in the lobby to check in. Scanning the surroundings, I spotted Zachariah Sahs sitting on a couch that threatened to swallow up his tiny frame. For a moment I recalled the day we discovered him. Grey and I had been crafting the book under Jim's watchful eye and Deborah Purcell's valuable input. We had named each of *The Good Guys*, assigned them powers, and figured out the rudiments of their personalities. (At that early stage, Grey was even drawing faces on the characters.) About some of the group we were uncertain, but on one character we were in total agreement. He would be the youngest, he'd be eight years old, and we would call him Zack. Zack would like Sega Game Gear and would play it to death, and he'd be a child of immense faith, a believer in magic.... One evening soon after the contest entries began to pile up, I came into the DEFIANT offices, and Grey accosted me before I could even get off my coat. "Jan, we found him! We found *Spellcaster*! Look here!" He showed me a picture of the Sahs boy, the very embodiment of the child hero we had envisioned. "And get this," Grey continued, his smile widening, "his name is really Zack!"

From left to right: Reginald Jackson, Daniel Jacob, Jenni Lee, Jim Shooter and Zachariah Sahs, Jeff Miller, Paul Cohen, and Matthew Gyrich.

When I caught sight of that little guy sitting on the couch in the hotel lobby,

Jenni Lee and her family arriving in style.

with his feet swinging high off the floor, it was like seeing a dearly missed little brother. "Zack!" I shouted. No constraint *here*—this was our buddy, Zachariah Sahs, our one-and-only *Spellcaster*! Later, Grey and I stood together and watched him as he zipped here and there, like some toy you might wind up...only Zack never seemed to wind down!

Getting settled in our rooms gave *me*, at least, an opportunity to wind down: There had been nearly too much excitement for one day, and so far we had met only three of the eight *Good Guys*! We were scheduled to meet four of the remaining five at a DEFIANT-hosted dinner in honor of the eight winners that evening. (One *Good Guy* wouldn't be joining us, but more about that later.)

At 7:00 PM, I walked into the dining room, stopped, and searched the faces. One by one I spotted each of them—first Jenni Lee (*White Crane*), then Daniel Jacob (*Recon*), next Reginald Jackson (*Nobody*), and finally, Matthew Gyrich (*Skrag*). They were all virtually on target! In fact, Daniel's mother asked at one point during the weekend, "How did you manage to shape the characters beforehand so closely to the children you selected?" Well, if you were to ask Deborah and Grey, who spent countless hours culling through entries, I'm sure they'd tell you it was a matter of recognition "Hey, is she *White Crane*, or is she *White Crane*?!"

The morning of Saturday, November 27 came quickly. It was the day we were to present our winners to the media at Chuck Rozanski's Mile High Comics store. With all the excitement, there was a note

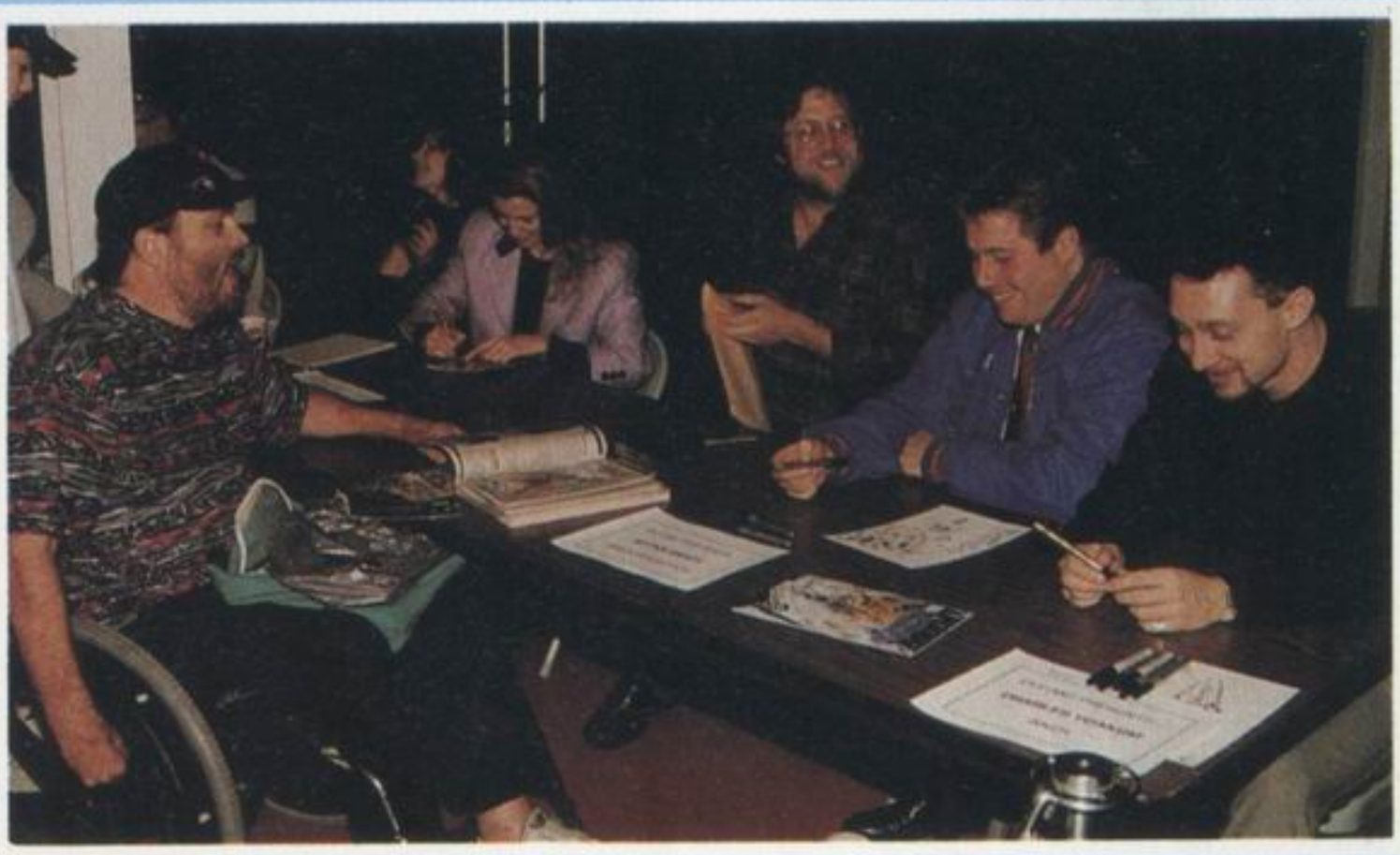
Chris Hunter Photography

Grey (second from left) and Jan Childress (seated, with blue jacket on lap) relax with *The Good Guys* after a DEFIANT-hosted dinner.

of sadness, though. Seven of *The Good Guys* and their families were off to Disneyland for the day as a part of their contest prize (I tagged along, knowing no shame!), but the eighth *Good Guy* was missing.

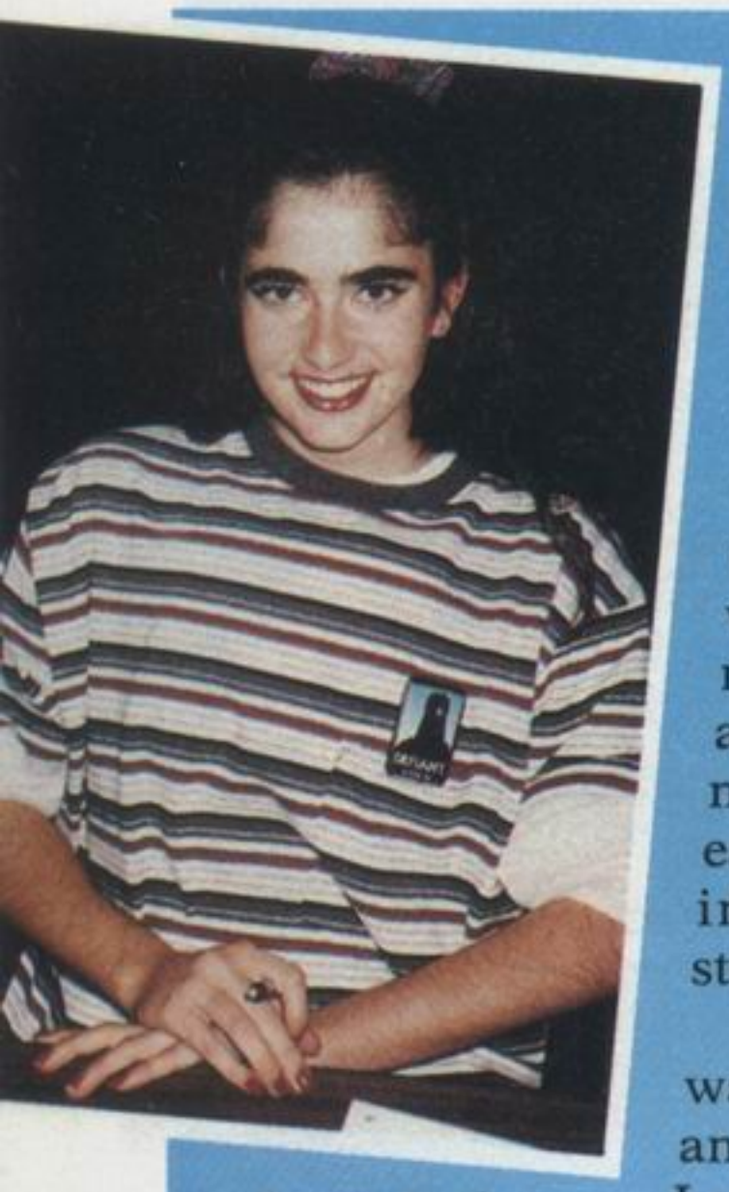
Laura Neale had been in a serious auto accident, the victim of a drunk driver. She was home in a body cast, and bedridden much of the time or confined to a wheelchair. Her character, *Flex*, was to be the strongest member of the team, and the oldest, at sixteen; fiercely independent, intelligent, full of hope and promise, she would be the very embodiment of the invincibility of youth. For these reasons, I had a difficult time reconciling the ideal with the reality. Most of what we had seen in Anaheim thus far was a perfect example of life imitating art. This was too rude a departure.

We headed to Mile High Comics after the day at Disney. Entering the store on that warm California evening was like walking into the sudden reality of a recurring dream. I walked around the fabulously huge store, spotting familiar sights and "landmarks"—familiar because Mile High had served as the setting for the explosive origin of *THE GOOD GUYS*. "This is where Rob Liefeld was signing autographs," I said to myself. "It was here that



Chris Hunter Photography

Deborah Purcell, Len Wein, Ed Polgardy, and Charles Yoakum signing comics for DEFIANT fans.



Laura Neale smiles heroically.

Skrag bumped into Slob. And—yes!—this is the spot where the wish bomb went off." And then there was Chuck Rozanski, who, along with his staff, made us all feel very special and very much at home. (Chuck also added to the winners' delight by giving each of them a spending account in the store.)

Next on the schedule was a signing session, and Jim Shooter, Grey, Len Wein, Charles Yoakum, Ed Polgardy, Deborah Purcell, and I greeted fans while *The Good Guys* and their families rested up. When the time drew near for "the big event," Jim gathered us all in the back room of the store: creators, DEFIANT staff, *The Good Guys* and their families, members of the media. We were all there. Everybody except Laura Neale. We lined up backstage, awaiting Jim's introductions from the podium. Grey turned to me and said, "She's not coming." "It's all right," I responded. "We'll just go and see her right after this is over." It really wasn't all right, though. It was a shot of harsh reality. Laura Neale should have been there with the rest of us, not lying at home in bed looking forward to a two-year recovery period.

Jim first introduced the creative staff: Deborah, Ed, Grey, Charles, and myself. Second came *The Good Guys*: Jenni, Matt, Paul, Jeff, Reginald, Daniel, and Zack. Then Jim fumbled...or forgot...or just got caught up in the moment: He started to introduce the eighth *Good Guy*. He looked around for one moment amidst the thin beams of emerald and blue light streaking across the stage and out at the flashbulbs erupting from the thick blackness. "And our eighth *Good Guy*"—she's not here, Jim!—"is"—a stirring backstage—"Laura"—Deborah's eyes brightened, and Ed turned to see what was going on—"Neale!" I looked at Grey, catching only his profile, but his grin was unmistakable, brighter than it had been all weekend. Slowly, with a soft, shy smile that veiled the pain she must have felt, Laura Neale walked onto the stage—no wheelchair, no crutches, no cane. There was no thunderous applause, no whistles or shrieks. Only the few of us onstage were even aware of what it must have taken for Laura, encumbered by a body cast, to leave her home and take centerstage with seven of her newfound companions.

I watched Jim—the child in him very much alive—and Grey—grinning with unabashed pride—and Laura—a hero, a genuine *Good Guy*. The laser lights began to dance around us, music blared, flashbulbs assaulted the eyes, a TV camera glared like some mechanical cyclops, blood raced beneath my skin, which crawled with excitement....

I crashed later that evening, failing to stay up with some of the staff to catch any late-night news clips of the event. It had been a long two days. I tried to sort it all out, as writers inevitably must do with each and every moment that sweeps by,

Chris Hunter Photography

Laura joining her fellow *Good Guys* as Jim Shooter officially introduces them at the Mile High Comics Mega-Store.

searching for morsels that make for captivating narrations. But from this event I came away only with questions and feelings, which may have been answers were there words to give them voice....

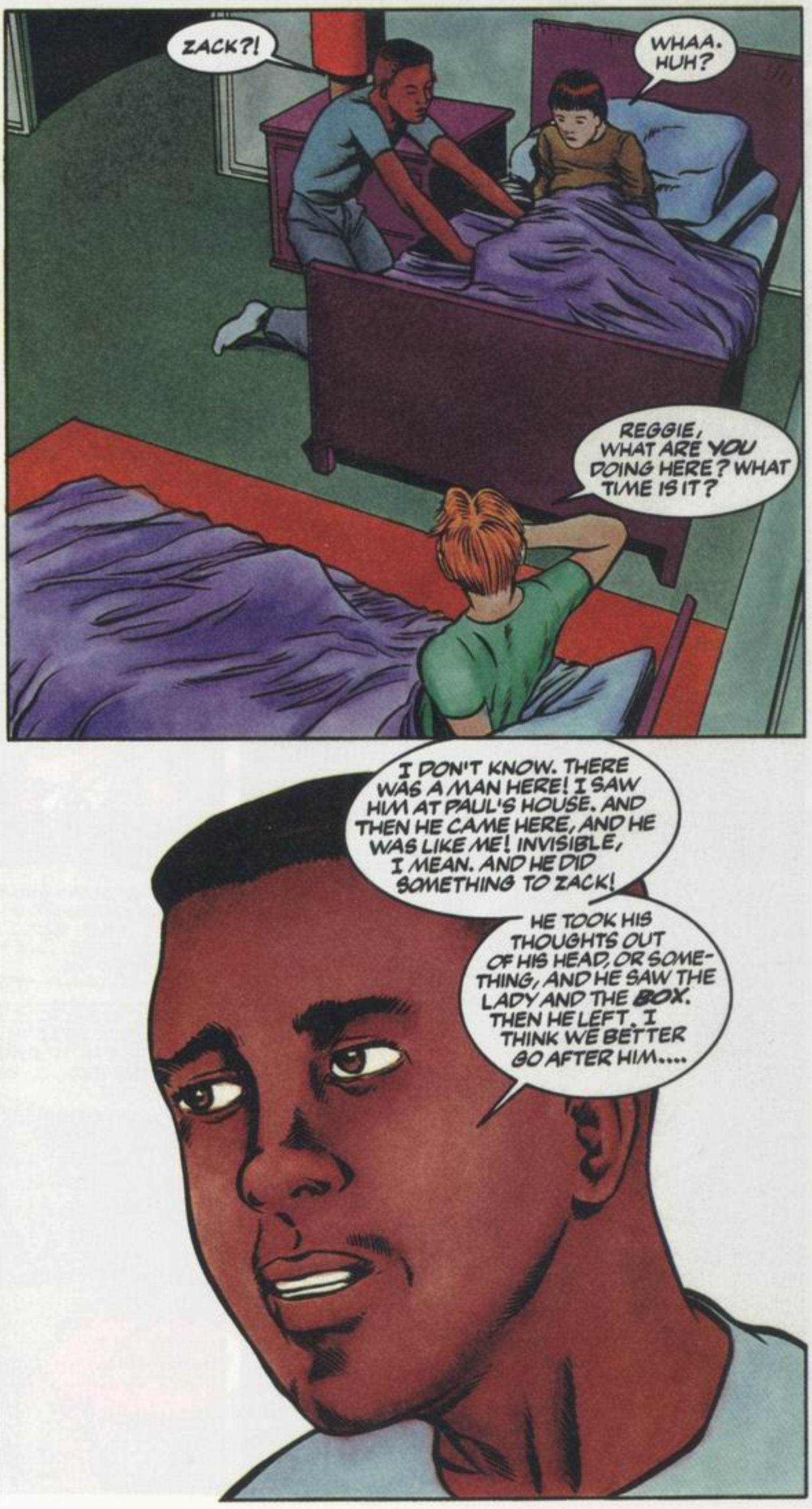
...Have you ever dreamed, and held that dream as too wondrous to be attainable, only to have it unfold before your eyes?

...Have you ever wished a mile high, only to have that wish cradle itself snugly within your grasp?

...Have you ever met a hero?

—Jan Childress

ZACK! ZACK, WAKE UP!


ZACK?!
WHAA. HUH?
REGGIE, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? WHAT TIME IS IT?
I DON'T KNOW. THERE WAS A MAN HERE! I SAW HIM AT PAUL'S HOUSE. AND THEN HE CAME HERE, AND HE WAS LIKE ME! INVISIBLE, I MEAN. AND HE DID SOMETHING TO ZACK!
HE TOOK HIS THOUGHTS OUT OF HIS HEAD, OR SOMETHING, AND HE SAW THE LADY AND THE BOX. THEN HE LEFT. I THINK WE BETTER GO AFTER HIM....

WOODVILLE STATE HOSPITAL FOR MENTAL HEALTH...

WOODVILLE

THE THINGS I COULD CREATE FROM ALL THIS FEAR...

I FEEL LIKE A SCULPTOR WITH FAR MORE CLAY THAN TIME TO SHAPE IT.

STILL, IT'S NICE TO KNOW IT'S AVAILABLE.

HERE'S HELEN SIMPSON'S ROOM....

HELLO, HELEN.

YOU'VE COME BACK! I KNEW YOU'D RETURN SOMEDAY, MY LOVE.

AFTER SO MANY MILLENNIA, YOU'VE CHANGED, BUT I'M SURE I HAVE, TOO. I KEPT THE BOX SAFE, LIKE YOU TOLD ME.

YES... I'M BACK. YOU STILL LOOK AS LOVELY AS EVER, BUT NOW I MUST HAVE THE BOX... MY LOVE.

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA, THE HOME OF DAN NEALE AND HIS DAUGHTER, LAURA, A.K.A. FLEX...

LAURA? LAURA, IT'S ME, DAN.

BOY, I HOPE THIS IS THE RIGHT WINDOW.

DAN... RECON, WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE? ARE YOU CRAZY?

THERE'S SOME SORT OF EMERGENCY. WE'RE SUPPOSED TO MEET THE REST OF THE GUYS RIGHT AWAY.

UH, LAURA, YOU LOOK REALLY BEAUTIFUL.

UM...

I GUESS I SHOULDN'T BE SEEING YOU IN YOUR NIGHTGOWN LIKE THIS.

UM... YEAH, I'D BETTER GET DRESSED NOW.

SHE'S HERE SOMEWHERE. THOSE PAPERS I FOUND IN HER HOUSE SAID SHE WAS IN *THIS* SECTION.

NOBODY OPENED THE DOOR! BESIDES, I DIDN'T EVEN WAKE HIM. HE'LL NEVER KNOW.

I CAN'T *BELIEVE* YOU SNUCK INTO THEIR HOUSE WHILE HER HUSBAND WAS ASLEEP!

WHY THE HECK IS SHE IN THE LOONEY BIN ANYWAY?

PEOPLE WOULD THINK *WE* WERE CRAZY, TOO, IF WE TOLD THEM WHAT WE COULD DO!

HELEN, I NEVER *MEANT* TO STAY AWAY SO LONG. MY THOUGHTS WERE ALWAYS OF YOU.

I THOUGHT YOU'D FORGOTTEN ALL ABOUT ME.

THAT NOISE!

DARLING, MY ENEMIES ARE COMING FOR ME. I NEED THE BOX TO KEEP US SAFE.

SHE CAN'T BE IN HERE. THIS WAY WAS LOCKED, AND THERE WERE GUARDS!
SHE'S NOT IN HER ROOM, AND WE DIDN'T PASS HER, SO SHE MUST BE DOWN THIS WAY.
UNLESS THAT GUY NOBODY SAW TOOK HER AWAY.
I BET THAT GUY IS AFTER THE BOX! WE CAN'T LET HIM GET IT. WHO KNOWS WHAT HE'D DO.
I WISH I HADN'T GIVEN IT BACK. WE SHOULD HAVE JUST KEPT IT.
WE SHOULD HAVE DESTROYED IT. THEN WE WOULDN'T HAVE TO DO THIS AGAIN.
WE CAN DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH IT WHEN WE FIND OUT WHERE IT...
...IS!
OH, NO.
YOU WERE SAYING...
HELLO, CHILDREN. THE MOST AMAZING THINGS HAVE BEEN HAPPENING LATELY, HAVEN'T THEY? AND I'VE BEEN DOING A GREAT DEAL OF RESEARCH TO DISCOVER JUST HOW YOU'VE BECOME SO... UNIQUE. SOMETHING IS GOING ON THAT MAKES WISHES COME TRUE, HMM?
YOU KIDS SHOW QUITE A LOT OF POTENTIAL TO BECOME AN ANNOYANCE, SO I'VE ENLISTED THESE CHARMING FOLK FROM THE CRIMINALLY INSANE WARD TO DEAL WITH YOU.
THEIR MINDS ARE ALL FULL OF TWISTED VISIONS. JUST IMAGINE WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN IF I OPEN THIS BOX AND THEIR WISHES COME TRUE.
OH, NO! IT'S GONNA TURN THEM INTO MONSTERS!

I THOUGHT THAT MIGHT WORK.

GOODBYE, CHILDREN.

HIT 'EM HARD AND FAST, MEN! LET'S GET THIS OVER WITH AND GET OUT OF HERE!

THAT GUY, CHASM, SAID HE'D GET US OUT OF HERE IF WE'D *KILL* 'EM.

HE'S GONE. WHY BOTHER?

CAUSE IT'S *FUN!* TWIST THEIR LITTLE HEADS OFF!

WELL, NOW I SEE HOW YOU KIDS DISCOVERED WHAT I WAS DOING.

I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU LEARNED TO ENTER THE SUBSTRATUM...

...BUT YOU CANNOT STAY.

YOU'RE GROUNDED, LITTLE BIRD!

OUT OF THE WAY, BEEF. I'LL PUT A SPELL ON HER! OOH, IT TINGLES!

YOU'RE STRONG, BUT YOU'RE SLO--

SLOW, HUH?

ZACK! HE'S KNOCKING ME ALL OVER THE ROOM!

IF I GET THROUGH YOUR SHELL, I'LL KNOCK YOUR **BLOCK** OFF!

YOU'RE STRONG. TOO BAD YOU DON'T KNOW HOW TO **FIGHT**, MISSY!

YOU DON'T KNOW DIDDLY ABOUT WAR, PUNK! LET A **SOLDIER** TEACH 'YA THIS AIN'T NO LYIN' MOVIE. ***THIS*** IS THE REAL THING.

ALL BROKEN.

MOMMA ALWAYS SAID I DIDN'T KNOW MY OWN STRENGTH.

TO BE CONTINUED...

letters TO THE EDITOR

DEFIANT welcomes your comments.

Please address all mail to:
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Dear DEFIANT,
THE GOOD GUYS #1 is an exciting comic that's easy to read (not much in the way of mangled pseudo-science ramblings) and even easier to get into. With the slew of superhero teams out there right now, it's rare to find one that doesn't make you feel lost after an issue.

All the realistic little touches are what made this book so believable: a character who learned English from comics; the male reactions to the good-looking female in the store; the hysteria at the Rob Liefield signing; etc.

Also, it's inspiring to me, as a "letterhack," to see a fellow letter writer turn pro—and do so on such a big-name title. I'm curious as to the working relationship between Jim Shooter and Mr. Childress: Who does what?

Augie De Blieck, Jr.
North Haledon, NJ

The working relationship between Jim Shooter and myself is that of a master to an apprentice . I write, and Jim corrects and teaches. Therein probably rests his most lasting contribution to the industry—his willingness to take unproven talent and guide it towards its pinnacle.–J.C.

Dear DEFIANT Crew,
I just read *THE GOOD GUYS* #1 and wanted you to know how much I enjoyed it. What immediately grabbed my attention about the book was the stunning artwork. On the surface it looks deceptively simple: There is absolutely no cross-hatching, which would be a negative for Image fans, but for those of us who want anatomically accurate and not over-rendered artwork, it's a major plus. Every line is necessary. Also, the colors are smooth and soft—more like pastels than the harsh, heavy marker look that most comics have. Beautiful.

As for the writing, Jan Childress and Jim Shooter both deserve credit for a fun, magical story that held my attention. By grounding it in the real world, a world of Mortal Combat video games, Rob Liefield comics, *Star Trek* t-Shirts, and "The Far Side" calendars, they gave the story a feeling of immediacy and familiarity that comic fans can relate to. Most impressively, though, the issue introduced seven major heroes and gave them all distinct, unique personalities. A lot of companies seem to think giving their heroes funky powers and code names is enough of an introduction, but it's not. My favorite *Good Guy*? Nobody (that's the character's name, not an expression of indifference!), because he has personality traits I can identify with.

Keep up the excellent work!

Scott Haan
Lafayette, IN

Dear DEFIANT crew:
Cool. Neat. Wild. These are the adjectives I thought of as I read *THE GOOD GUYS* #1. Being 25 years old, I cannot be considered a kid anymore, but this comic made me recall those bygone days: the innocent teasing and arguments, the notion that anything is possible if you try hard enough, and the general attempts at optimism in the face of

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adversity. I don't know when exactly it happens, but as people reach adulthood, that youthful spirit seems to fade. Well, I think *THE GOOD GUYS* can help bring some of it back.

Other comic books have featured kid or teenage superheros, but for some reason the kids end up talking and acting like adults. Kids can show the supposed intelligence and wisdom of older people, but, in *THE GOOD GUYS*, please temper these with the innocence and enthusiasm of youth. I also hope you'll show the kids as they go through the process of growing up. It would add a reality and depth that's lacking in most of today's comics. If we adults let kids act like kids and pay attention to them, we can all learn. Keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Alvaro E. Pereira
New York, NY

Dear Mr. Shooter,
About ten years ago, when you were at Marvel, you came out with a comic called *Power Pack*, which quickly became one of my favorites. Sadly, when you left, *Power Pack* seemed to lose its magic, and thus was canceled.

Of all the DEFIANT titles, *THE GOOD GUYS* is the one I waited for the most. It offers the magic of *Power Pack*, and, at the same time, is original in that these kids are much more powerful.

While the theme in *Spider-Man* was "With great power comes great responsibility," this comic is asking, "What happens when a child gets great powers before one can reasonably expect a child of such an age to be responsible for these powers?" (By the way, I like Spellcaster the best—he's the life of the show. Perhaps someday he'll receive his own DEFIANT title.)

I'm going to make an odd prediction for you—that the audience for *THE GOOD GUYS* will be in their 20s and older, while the audience in *The Good Guys'* age group (ages 8-16) will prefer the DEFIANT titles with adult casts, like *WARRIORS OF PLASM* and *DARK DOMINION*.

Cordially,
Steven Craig Horn
Oklahoma City, OK

Dear Jim Shooter
and Company,
Not only did the much-anticipated *DARK DOMINION* #0 arrive, but on the very same day, the explosive first issue of the third DEFIANT title, *THE GOOD GUYS*, found its way into my eager hands. Well, that's not completely true—I had initially thought *THE GOOD GUYS* would be the least interesting of the upcoming DEFIANT books, mostly because I couldn't see the fun in a bunch of kids gaining superpowers. I mean, with great power comes great responsibility, and there's no way a couple of 12-year-olds can handle powers like that.

Now, after reluctantly reading *THE GOOD GUYS* #1, I must say I'm forced to alter my opinion: This series is almost as intriguing as *DARK DOMINION*, equally as intense as *WARRIORS OF PLASM*, and, above all, a truly unique concept to begin with! I found myself actually enjoying the adventures of Paul, Matt, Dan, Reggie, Jen, Laura, and Zack, and even fondly remembering the days when I wanted to be a superhero myself, no more than ten years ago. Still, I found it somewhat unrealistic that these seven kids are as morally correct as the most patriotic hero. You can't learn something like this in merely one day; it takes months, a lot of experience, and myriad ups and downs to even begin to define the thin line between black and white, between "the good guys" and "the bad guys."

The most intriguing aspect of this issue was that Zachariah, and not the so-called "magic box," might have been the catalyst of *The Good Guys* gaining their powers, and I'm sure this'll mean the beginning of a dozen interesting stories about the true origin of these unique powers. All things considered, I feel it's more than safe to prophesy a blossoming, bright future for *THE GOOD GUYS*. With this series DEFIANT has shown itself to be a versatile company, and ground-breaking. Hopefully you'll continue to amaze us all throughout the coming years.

Olav Beemer
Zeist, The
Netherlands